



1st ASEM Social Partners Forum
*"How to make globalisation a success for all?
Social partner contributions to the ASEM process"*
Brussels, June 30th – July 1st, 2008
– background information and objectives -

Introduction

The ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting)¹ process is an informal, high-level and comprehensive dialogue process on political, economic, social and cultural matters. It is the main multilateral forum for EU-Asia dialogue, including in the area of employment and social policy and aims to strengthen the relationship and increase mutual understanding between the two regions in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership. It foresees a number of regular high-level meetings, including biennial summits, ministerial meetings in a number of areas, business summits, as well as civil society fora and people-to-people exchanges.

1st ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Meeting, September 2006, Potsdam

A first ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Conference (LEMC-1) was held on 3-5 September 2006 in Potsdam, Germany, under the theme "More and better jobs: Working jointly to strengthen the social dimension of globalisation" - in response to the mandate by the 5th ASEM Summit in Hanoi in 2004 to expand cooperation in areas of common interest such as employment and to address strategic and longer-term political and social dimensions of globalisation.

At this meeting, Ministers underlined the importance of a close and productive dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe on employment and social policy and welcomed the exchange of best practices on labour market and employment policies and social protection in the ASEM context. They pointed out that globalisation, the international division of labour and the need for restructuring have strongly affected both Asia and Europe and increased the interdependencies between the two regions which – despite different developments regarding employment and investment policies - are facing common challenges.

Ministers noted the importance of making globalisation a success for all, while at the same time acknowledging the need to resist protectionist approaches. They recognised that achieving both objectives requires good governance and effective education, employment and social policies, sharing the view that such policies should include a certain number of common features valid across all countries, irrespective of their level of income and notwithstanding important differences in immediate priority areas.

Ministers agreed to reinforce regional cooperation between the EU and Asia as a good way to strengthen the social dimension of globalisation. They suggested that further cooperation should also try to involve the social partners and other relevant actors in an appropriate way.

¹ ASEM comprises 45 members: the 27 EU member states and the European Commission on the European side, and the ASEAN countries, China, India, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan and the ASEAN Secretariat on the Asian side; for a full list of members please see the table in the annex; for further information on ASEM, please also see the related website of the External Relations Directorate-General of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asem/intro/index.htm.

6th ASEM Summit, September 2006, Helsinki

At the 6th ASEM Summit which was held on 10-11 September 2006 in Helsinki under the overarching theme "10 years of ASEM: Global challenges – joint responses", Heads of State welcomed the intensification of Asia-Europe relations and enhanced interaction in all major areas of cooperation. They highlighted the importance of the first ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers' Conference and its results as well as the need to sustain the substantive ASEM dialogue and cooperation in this field, including with social partners.

Heads of State discussed on globalisation and the opportunities that it is bringing about both in Asia and Europe. They exchanged views on how to manage the rapid transformation and structural change of their countries' economies while recognising the need to tackle the challenges of globalisation and to extend its benefits to all. They recognised the need to strengthen the social dimension of globalisation, underlining that productive employment, decent work, the protection of rights of all workers, and social cohesion are crucial for sustainable socio-economic development.

At the Helsinki Summit Heads of State also adopted a declaration on the future of ASEM in which they reiterated their commitment to promoting conditions conducive to sustainable economic and social development through ASEM, while noting that ASEM enables Asia and Europe to reap the benefits of globalisation, tackle the challenges posed by growing global interdependence, and contribute to the well-being of present and future generations.

Heads of State recommended that, at the beginning of its second decade, ASEM focus on key policy areas of common concern such as globalisation, competitiveness and structural changes in the global economy, including labour issues, education and human resource development. They underlined that ASEM will further promote focussed cooperative initiatives linked to policy dialogue which may involve other relevant stakeholders, including the social partners and civil society, thus contributing to a stronger feeling of ownership and enhancing the visibility and awareness of ASEM among the wider public.

Preparatory meeting for LEMC-2, September 2007, Yogyakarta

The 2nd ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Conference (LEMC-2) will take place on 14-16 October 2008 in Bali, Indonesia, under the theme "More and better jobs – Strengthening partnership to take advantage from global labour market toward decent work".

A preparatory meeting was held on 12-13 September 2007 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and identified in particular the following three topics for discussion at the ministerial conference: training and employability; social protection and corporate social responsibility; and labour migration, with a focus on intra-regional migration and the labour market integration and protection of migrants.

The meeting further reiterated the need for ASEM to embark on substantial cooperation in the area of labour and employment. It discussed a number of cooperation projects to be considered for possible implementation under the ASEM process, including: social security for workers in the informal sectors; labour market integration of migrant workers; capacity building in the field of vocational training; occupational safety and health; and the role of corporate social responsibility for the well-being of ASEM work forces.

The meeting finally renewed the Potsdam and Helsinki call for the involvement of social partners and underlined the importance of involving stakeholders in the process of ASEM dialogue on labour and employment, while taking note of the wish of social partners to be involved in an appropriate way in the ASEM framework for the forthcoming events.

1st ASEM Social Partners Forum, 30 June – 1 July 2008, Brussels

To promote the active involvement of social partners in the ASEM dialogue and cooperation in the area of employment and social policy – and in response to the various calls described above - the European Commission, in close cooperation with the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, the French Ministry of Labour, Social Relations, Family and Solidarity and the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration, organises a 1st ASEM Social Partner Forum on 30 June – 1 July 2008 in Brussels.

This Forum will bring together some 120-150 high-level representatives of social partner organisations and national authorities as well as other experts from the 43 ASEM member countries as well as the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission. Participants include European Commissioner Špidla, Slovenian Minister of Labour Cotman, Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs De Gucht Ministers as well as high-level representatives from France, Indonesia and China.

The Forum provides a unique opportunity for a first joint meeting of Asian and European social partners in the context of the ASEM process. It offers a framework for social partner representatives to get to know each other; share information and best practice on policy priorities and social dialogue practices in the context of globalisation; formulate suggestions and expectations concerning the implementation of the ASEM dialogue and cooperation in the area of employment and social policy; and discuss on the role and further contributions of social partners to the ASEM process in general and the ASEM dialogue and cooperation in the area of employment and social policy in particular. The Forum will allow for in-depth discussions in a number of thematic areas of particular interest to social partners, including: qualifications, training and employability; employment creation and flexicurity; poverty reduction, social protection and social cohesion; and working conditions and quality of work.

A summary of the Forum discussions will be transmitted for information to the ASEM Senior Labour Officials Meeting and the 2nd ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Conference on 13-15 October 2008 in Bali.

Travel and accommodation expenses of invited social partner representatives and expert speakers will be borne by the European Commission.



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– Annex: Overview table of ASEM members -

ASEM members (45 in total)	
European members (28 in total)	Asian members (17 in total)
Belgium	Brunei Darussalam*
Bulgaria (as of 2008)	Cambodia
Czech Republic	China*
Denmark	India (as of 2008)
Germany	Indonesia*
Estonia	Japan
Greece	Korea
Spain	Laos
France	Malaysia
Ireland	Mongolia (as of 2008)
Italy	Myanmar
Cyprus	Pakistan (as of 2008)
Latvia	Philippines
Lithuania	Singapore
Luxembourg	Thailand
Hungary	Vietnam
Malta	ASEAN Secretariat (as of 2008)
Netherlands	
Austria	
Poland	
Portugal	
Romania (as of 2008)	
Slovenia*	
Slovakia	
Finland	
Sweden	
United Kingdom	
European Commission*	* ASEM coordinators